



bluegill

Lepomis macrochirus

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Osteichthyes
Order:	Perciformes
Family:	Centrarchidae

Features

The average bluegill weighs one-fourth pound and is eight to 10 inches long. A dark flap extends from the gill cover. The pectoral fin is long and pointed and three spines are present in the anal fin. The body is deep and flattened side to side. The back and sides are dark olive green with emerald and brownish reflections. The breast and belly are yellow, reddish-orange, or even a pink-purple color. Breeding males can have a deep red, almost dark brown, breast. Dark bars sometimes are visible on the sides. The gill covers and chin are bright blue.

Natural History

The bluegill lives in lakes, ponds, backwaters, creeks, and rivers with warm, clear water and plenty of aquatic plants. It eats insects, small fish, crayfish, and snails. It moves in groups of about 20 to 30 fish and is active in the evening and early morning. It is mature at age one. Spawning occurs May through August. The male builds a nest by fanning his fins over the bottom. The female deposits 2,300 to 67,000 eggs.

Several females may spawn in the same nest and a female may deposit eggs in more than one nest. The male guards the eggs, which hatch in five to 10 days. Small males that have been unable to establish their own territory may spawn by sneaking into the territory of a larger male. The small male can fertilize eggs when the larger male is occupied with something else or by behaving like a female to fool the larger male. The bluegill has an average life span of four to six years.

Habitats

constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; natural lakes and prairie marshes; interior rivers and streams; Mississippi River; Missouri River

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.